

# **Community-Based Educational Program for Adjudicated Juveniles**

**Certified Public Manager Program  
Class of 2018**

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February 5, 2018**

## **Background**

The South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) is a cabinet agency that strives towards their mission to “protect the public and reclaim the lives of juveniles through prevention, community services, education and rehabilitative services in the least restrictive environment”<sup>1</sup>. The Agency is responsible for providing rehabilitation and custodial care for the state’s juveniles who are on probation, parole or committed to DJJ for a criminal or status offense. DJJ is comprised of five divisions: Division of Community Services, Rehabilitative Services, Educational Services, Administrative Services, Planning and Programs, and three support offices: Office of Treatment and Intervention Services, Inspector General, and Legal, Legislative and Policy Coordination<sup>2</sup>. In an effort to meet the Agency’s mission, DJJ works collaboratively with other state and local entities including law enforcement, solicitors, family court judges, the Juvenile Parole Board, and other child-serving agencies.

The Community Service Division consists of forty three county offices covering all forty six counties across the state and is responsible for providing a multitude of services and programs for juveniles and their families. The staff who make up the county offices varies based on size of the population that they serve. All offices however deliver prevention programs, walk in services, conduct detention screenings, intake services to include interviews, diversion and court recommendations, referral for services, standard, moderate and intensive

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<sup>1</sup>SCDJJ Website, <http://www.sc.us/djj>

<sup>2</sup>SCDJJ Website, <http://www.sc.us/djj>

levels of supervision for juveniles on probation, parole or committed to the long term institution. Case managers (typically called Community Specialists) are involved with juveniles from the initial time they enter in the juvenile justice system until they complete probation or parole. To increase the possibility of refraining from delinquent acts and making choices that promote a prosocial lifestyle, case managers work closely with service providers such as mental health counselors, substance abuse specialists, social services, vocational rehabilitation centers, schools, and other community partners who offer various types of support for juveniles and their families.

### **Problem Statement**

According to the DJJ Annual Statistical Reports for the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 fiscal years, 15,697 and 15,429 respectively were the number of new juvenile cases that were processed across the state by DJJ<sup>3</sup>. During that same time frame, 803 of those cases were processed in Aiken County with 362 being prosecuted and 201 being placed on probation.<sup>4</sup> With the number of juveniles who are entering and remaining in the juvenile justice system each year, it can become overwhelming for county case managers to provide the required level of supervision for youth offenders residing in the community. Many of these offenders remain under the supervision of DJJ for significant periods due to their refusal to comply with mandatory school attendance or their inability to remain in the traditional school setting

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<sup>3</sup> SCDJJ Annual Statistical Report 2014-2015

<sup>4</sup> SCDJJ Annual Statistical Report 2015-2016

due to repeatedly engaging in disruptive behaviors. In Section 59-65-10 of the South Carolina Code of Laws, school attendance or participation in another academic program approved by the State Board of Education for students five years old until their seventeenth birthday is mandated<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, if juveniles under the supervision of DJJ do not attend school or another approved program, actions have to be taken to enforce compliance with the law. These actions often result in the juveniles remaining on probation or parole for extended periods of time as well as the Agency having to allocate financial resources to use graduated sanctions such as GPS monitoring, psychological evaluations (either in the community or in a secured facility), alternative placement or even commitment to DJJ's long term institution. Juveniles, however, who are committed to DJJ's main campus at the Broad River Road Complex, housed at the Juvenile Detention Center, committed to one of the three evaluation centers, or in one of DJJ's contracted alternative placements across the state, can prepare and take the GED (General Equivalency Development) at age 16 as an alternative to earning a high school diploma. The DJJ school district is responsible for all of the educational programs operated by the agency, including those in private provider programs and alternative school sites in community residential placement facilities<sup>6</sup>. This is accomplished by the use of online instruction provided by teachers employed by DJJ's own independent school district. The goal of this project is to research if state funds could be saved, supervision for probation and parole could be shortened and more juvenile offenders in Aiken County could attain academic

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<sup>5</sup> South Carolina Code of Laws

<sup>6</sup> SCDJJ Website, <http://www.sc.us/djj>

achievement prior to being released from the juvenile justice system if DJJ provided a community-based educational site.

### **Data Collection**

In an effort to research the potential benefits of a DJJ community-based alternative educational program, essential information was gathered. Initially, data that was specific to Aiken County juveniles was retrieved from the 2014-2015 & 2015-2016 SC DJJ Annual Statistical Reports released by the Agency's Office of Research and Statistics. This information was critical as it provided data on the number of juvenile cases in Aiken County during the specified time frame as well as the number of juvenile cases that were dismissed or diverted, prosecuted and placed on probation. Next, data was collected from reviewing inactive case files in which juveniles were released from probation between 2014-2016, were either 16 or 17 years old, the number of months under the supervision of DJJ, whether they had to be removed from the community and placed either in an alternative placement or secured facility, and the number of juveniles who earned a GED or HS diploma prior to their release from probation or parole. In addition, specific information was ascertained from the agency's website about the DJJ-funded Teen After School Centers (TASC) regarding time of use and resources available at the sites. Finally, financial information pertaining to out of home placements, the long term institution and GPS monitoring was collected from DJJ's Procurement department.

### **Data Analysis**

In reviewing the information from the Annual Reports and inactive case files, 803 new juvenile cases were identified as being processed in Aiken County between 2014-2016.

Of those new cases, 362 were prosecuted and 201 were placed on probation<sup>7</sup>. It was further determined that 126 juveniles who were either 16 or 17 years old, were released from their court-ordered supervision during the same period of time. Of those juveniles who left the juvenile justice system, only 16 earned either a GED or high school diploma. A remainder of 110 youths were eligible to participate in a DJJ GED program, but only if they had been removed from their home and community and placed either in a residential facility or committed to DJJ's long term institution. In addition, the data that was collected and assessed indicated that the 16 juveniles who earned a GED or high school diploma averaged 22 months in the juvenile justice system; whereas, the youth who did not earn a GED or diploma averaged only 16 months in the system. Furthermore, the data revealed that the 16 youths spent time in 116 placements or secured facilities, averaging 7 placements per youth (although one juvenile had 16 and another had 34). The 110 offenders spent time in 293 placements or secured facilities, averaging 3 placements per youth (although one had 21, two had 10 and three had 14)<sup>8</sup>.

Based on the information ascertained by the Procurement department on funding for additional sanctions, specifically GPS monitoring, community and secured evaluations, alternative placements and commitments to DJJ, the following cost approximations were revealed: \$3.50 per day for electronic monitoring, \$600 for an approximately six hour community evaluation, \$3,000 for an approximately 30 day secured evaluation, \$80-\$120

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<sup>7</sup> SCDJJ Annual Statistical Reports, 2014-2015, 2015-2016

<sup>8</sup> Inactive case files, Aiken County DJJ

per day in a residential program across the state and \$400 per day at the main campus on Broad River Road.<sup>9</sup>

When looking at the possibility of utilizing the pre-established TASC centers for a community-based educational site, there was no additional funding by DJJ that was determined to be needed due to the locations not being used until after the end of the traditional school day. Therefore, the classrooms would be available and the onsite computers could be utilized to access the online instruction provided by the DJJ school district.

### **Implementation Plan**

Although the data did not fully indicate the results that I had anticipated, the utilization of DJJ TASC centers to develop an alternative educational site for adjudicated juveniles is still believed to be of great benefit to the lives of many Aiken County youth. Simply by being in an environment where these young people are accepted and encouraged rather than targeted as they so often are in the public school system, can promote an incredible sense of self confidence and motivation. Research has identified low academic achievement, dropping out of school, lack of commitment to education and school failure as risk factors for problematic behavior, juvenile delinquency, illegal substance abuse, gang affiliation and committing violent and serious crimes<sup>10</sup>. With such startling research, it is imperative that the state of South Carolina develop programs and opportunities that will provide support to youth in pursuing and obtaining academic success.

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<sup>9</sup> SCDJJ Procurement , Appendix A

<sup>10</sup> Cox, Stephen and et al. (2013). Juvenile Justice: A Guide to Theory, Policy and Practice

Since DJJ is statutorily mandated to provide rehabilitation and custodial care to the state's adjudicated juveniles, the agency whose mission statement is to "reclaim juveniles through....education..." should take a proactive step in meeting the academic needs of those most at risk for committing crimes. If a commitment to do so is made then at the very least, South Carolina would have a more educated and less unemployed population of citizens who could collaboratively work to improve the state's overall quality of life. With that in mind, Aiken would be an excellent county to pilot an alternative educational program for a full academic year.

Minimal modifications could be made to one of the two TASC centers in Aiken to operate Monday through Thursday from 8:30 AM to 12:30 PM. With computers connected to the internet already installed on site, the necessary steps could be taken to access the online instruction of DJJ teachers. College interns could serve as educational assistants to offer additional guidance to the juveniles as they worked online. The interns could therefore meet the requirements for a college internship while the juveniles were benefited from their knowledge, experience and academic aspirations without the agency spending additional financial resources. In addition, Community Specialists from the Aiken DJJ office could oversee the four-hour program and offer assistance as needed. Developing a fully functioning academic site may initially appear as a daunting conquest; however, with the primary equipment and processes in place, it is a realistic and achievable goal.



## **Evaluation Method**

To evaluate the success of a potential pilot community-based educational program, a comparison of the number of juveniles who participated in the program and the number of juveniles who passed the GED exam during the piloted academic year will be paramount. In addition, there are other significant factors to determine if the alternative program could be advantageous to juveniles maintained in the community under the supervision and jurisdiction of DJJ. Supplemental factors include exploring changes to the length of time served on probation, graduated sanctions used, behavioral feedback from parents, maintaining a “standard” level of probation, additional charges filed, attended a Job Readiness Training Program, secured employment, enrolled in a technical school, placed in an alternative residential program, and committed to a secured facility. Finally, taking note of whether the college interns were dependable and competent and if there was a negative impact on the Community Specialists’ ability to fulfill their job duties and responsibilities could also be assessed.

## **Summary and Recommendations**

The purpose of this project was to research if establishing a community-based educational site operated by DJJ would have a positive impact on reducing agency costs, shortening terms of probation and parole, and increasing achieving a GED or high school diploma prior to being released from DJJ’s supervision. After reviewing case files of juveniles who were released between 2014-2016 and were at least 16 years old, it was discovered that 126 juveniles had been eligible take the GED exam based on DJJ’s requirements; however, only 16 of these youths earned one. When delving into case files further, the length of time in the

juvenile justice system was averaged to be longer for the 16 juveniles (22 months) than the remaining 110 (16 months). In addition, the expenses paid by the agency for those 16 appeared to be higher for the 16 due to averaging payment for 7 community or secured placements in comparison to the non-GED recipients who averaged only 3 placements. Upon close observation of the offenders' files that were assessed, it could be surmised that the extended supervision and lengthier exposure to moderate to high structured settings reduced distractions frequently associated with juvenile offenders such as high crime neighborhoods, gang-related activities, illegal substance use, truancy and family violence<sup>11</sup>. When provided with structure, consistency, accountability, and a dependable, supportive adult, the juveniles' ability to learn and apply knowledge generated more positive results for academic achievement. DJJ-funded TASC Centers provide structure, mentoring, tutoring, service coordination and resource development for adolescent males and females. It is therefore recommended that the TASC Centers in Aiken County be used as a part of a pilot program to provide assistance in preparing for the GED exam. The program could operate between the hours of 8:30 AM to 12:30 PM Monday through Thursday by recruiting college interns as education assistants, assigning a rotation schedule for the community specialists to supervise the participants and utilizing the resources such as computers and study materials that are already currently available in the centers yet are only used after the traditional school day ends. If an alternative educational site is developed, and the adolescents who fill the juvenile justice system are welcomed rather than targeted, academic success could become the norm and a life of crime could begin to get lost in a new world of hope, optimism and opportunities.

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<sup>11</sup> Loeber, R. and D. P. Farrington, Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998

## **Appendix A – Cost Approximations from DJJ Procurement**

Global Positioning System: \$3.50/day

Community Evaluations (6 hours): \$600

Secured Evaluations (30 days): \$3,000

Alternative Residential programs: \$80 - \$120/day

Juvenile Detention Center: \$50/day

Broad River Road Complex: \$400 / day

## Appendix B – Case files

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Initials	Age at release	Months on Supervision	Placement/Secured Facility	GED/Diploma
JA	16	3	0	No
EA	17	17	0	No
SA	17	46	4	No
MA	16	24	2	No
EB	17	7	1	YES
AB	17	10	0	No
JB	16	9	3	No
AB	17	15	10	No
DB	17	3	0	No
SB	16	11	3	No
AB	16	35	5	No
JB	17	22	2	No
TB	17	11	0	No
HC	17	35	14	No
KE	17	14	7	YES
TD	17	7	0	No
AD	17	33	0	YES
SD	16	10	1	No
AE	17	9	1	No
JF	16	16	5	No
KG	17	8	2	No
DG	17	34	9	No
JG	17	34	9	YES
RH	17	5	0	No
JH	16	6	0	No
TJ	16	13	2	No
CJ	17	4	0	No
CL	17	8	4	No
TL	17	12	2	No
PM	16	12	0	No
LM	17	21	0	YES
JM	17	70	34	YES
TM	17	9	2	No
WO	16	12	1	No
TR	16	9	0	No
TR	17	27	4	No
JR	17	11	1	No
BS	16	7	0	No
NS	17	9	1	YES
ES	17	6	3	No
BS	16	7	0	No
ES	17	45	9	YES

RS	17	7	0	No
LW	17	6	0	No
KW	16	30	1	No
JY	16	11	2	YES
AT	17	29	14	No
ST	17	8	0	YES
SW	17	9	4	No
SW	16	41	3	No
AW	16	8	0	No
TS	16	11	3	No
HS	17	33	16	YES
RS	17	13	0	No
CS	17	12	3	YES
HB	17	39	8	No
AB	16	15	3	No
FB	16	9	0	No
AB	16	15	3	No
JB	17	44	10	No
DC	16	7	0	No
DC	16	7	1	No
DC	16	8	0	No
SD	16	6	0	No
DF	16	4	1	No
AG	17	9	0	No
QG	16	12	3	YES
JG	16	5	0	No
JJ	16	4	3	No
ZL	16	8	7	No
CO	16	10	5	YES
DO	16	4	0	No
DW	16	22	1	No
AW	16	21	3	No
ZW	16	11	2	No
CS	16	10	4	No
FS	16	10	0	No
DT	17	13	1	YES
BT	16	9	0	No
AT	17	23	1	No
TP	16	7	0	No
NP	16	9	4	No
WP	16	9	0	No
HR	16	5	0	No
DS	16	8	0	No
KS	17	23	2	No
SV	16	8	1	No
DM	16	29	2	No
AM	16	27	0	No
LH	16	34	1	No
SS	17	17	0	No
SS	16	15	3	No

MS	16	8	3	No
WS	16	38	14	No
HS	17	52	6	No
BM	16	12	5	No
SM	16	20	5	No
DM	17	12	1	No
CN	16	25	5	No
DM	17	11	0	No
LK	17	43	21	No
PL	17	25	5	YES
BL	17	13	2	No
DL	16	18	2	No
WC	17	42	5	No
DC	17	6	1	No
DC	16	24	0	No
JC	16	5	0	No
MD	16	39	1	No
SD	17	22	4	No
CD	17	5	5	No
DB	17	8	0	No
KB	16	35	3	No
LC	17	9	1	No
CC	16	23	2	No
JA	16	9	3	No
KB	16	22	6	No
AN	17	5	0	No
IL	16	4	1	No
LP	17	8	0	No
NP	16	30	11	No
MR	17	22	10	No